

Chinese Temperament of Conceptual Art Form

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Abstract: Due to the lack of necessary ideal soil for cultural aesthetics in Chinese modern and contemporary art, there are many imitators of Western modern and contemporary art. With the deepening of globalization, conceptual art is placed in the context of Chinese modern and contemporary art development. How to correctly treat the relationship between China's own cultural system and the global diversified cultural system, how to look back on history with a complete and independent cultural attitude and have a real equal dialogue with the Western cultural system have become a realistic problem to be solved.

1. Introduction

Looking back at China's 5000-year cultural history, it has basically experienced four cultural fault periods. In Chinese history, the first cultural fault occurred from Xiyou to the Spring and Autumn period. Until Qin unified the six states, the doctrine of Confucius and Mencius had little inheritance in the 200 years, and then suffered the historical tragedy of Qin Shihuang (the first emperor of Qin Dynasty) ordering to burn Confucius books and bury Confucians alive. This is the second cultural fault. The third cultural fault happened in the Song Dynasty. At that time, Zhu Xi studied Confucianism and Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism formed a complete academic system, causing the high autocracy of political culture. In modern times, the May 4th Movement in 1919 emancipated the mind, holding high the banner of democracy on one hand and spreading the praises of anti-traditional policies on the one hand. Until the cultural revolution period of "eliminating the old ideas, old culture, old customs and habits" which was completely westernized later, the Chinese traditional culture was regarded as the dregs, and the consciousness of "imposing uniformity in all cases" was adopted, causing the fourth cultural fault.

Chinese modern and contemporary art produced in such a cultural background, so the artistic problems can't be simply attributed to the individual problems of artists or arts, which is the symptom of the times exposed by cultural fault. The development of conceptual art is bound to be born under such a cultural phenomenon. This paper mainly expounds the Chinese temperament of conceptual art form from three aspects, namely, the conceptual analysis of conceptual art, the influence and enlightenment of Laozi's Taoist thought on conceptual art, and the cultural paradox of conceptual art.

2. Interpretation Path of Conceptual Art

The principle characteristics of conceptual art works are thought, concept or meaning.^[1] In a more popular way, conceptual art works deconstruct the dependency of traditional works' value to visual aesthetics, emphasizing the power of concept itself and the degree of audience. However, David Davies defined conceptual art as "It is not something, but an action --- a symbol of action."^[2] To understand the meaning of this sentence, the example of Belgian artist Francis Alys is the most suitable.

On a street of Mexico in 1997, Alys moved the ice bricks to every corner of Mexico City under the scorching sun. The shape of the ice changed from ice bricks to ice blocks and finally turned into a pool of water. Undeniably, the process of pushing the ice was boring and hard. Alys edited the nine-hour performance art into a video work of more than ten minutes, and gave the work a very

conceptual name “Practical Paradox 1”. From a practical point of view, the significance of ice pushing lies in the artist’s initiative to give up his personal social attributes and all other actionable daily motivations, act to ignore the ideology of existing space cognition through a behavior mode like a game, and then realize the query and possible transformation of the existing functional differentiation or solidification space.

Therefore, on the issue of conceptual art interpretation, although it is understandable that artists do not want to intervene, it is necessary to admit that, in order to convey the conceptual art works more effectively, not only artists, audience objects (viewers and critics), but also the transmission mechanism must shoulder the mission of a community of common destiny, continue to interpret and produce explanations from it, which may create a bright future for the development of conceptual art.

3. Deduction of Taoist Thought to the Conceptual Works

From the perspective of concept, the ineffectiveness of Alys's ice pushing art behavior just verifies the Chinese Taoist philosophy of “governing by doing nothing” from Laozi’s Tao Te Ching, which advocates the conduct code of natural inaction, and advocates that do nothing and everything is done. “Inaction” mentioned in Laozi's idea of governing the country means that the governors do not interfere too much and are happy to see the success of the collective construction of the people’s “self-reliance”, so as to realize the ultimate goal of constructing self-worth. In my opinion, Laozi's “four noes” principle has two great benefits to Chinese contemporary art.

Firstly, it is helpful to the virtuous circle of social ethos. The development of postmodern art in China to the present situation seems to be smooth, but in fact, the good and bad are mixed. Under the name of avant-garde artists, there are many artists who engage in furtive activities. They turn over the Internet wall and bring in the achievements from abroad to deceive the praise and pursuit of the domestic public.

Secondly, it is helpful to innovate aesthetic thoughts. Although Plato's theory described art as “the copy of copy” and “the shadow of shadow”, it just became the logical evidence of the pioneer of conceptualism, Kosuth. He quoted this famous theory of philosophy history as a modern fable of “conceptual art”, and continued Duchamp’s original intention of using ready-made products, so as to elaborate his allegory and rational criticism on artists who blindly use ready-made products to become a star after commercial success. The publication of the work “Three Chairs” in 1965 was reported that it collected all the characteristics of conceptual art. The work was composed of three parts, namely, a real chair, a dictionary description of “chair” and a photo of a chair. The concept of the work is to explore the internal relationship among words, reality and images, and enumerate all the possibilities of the object from the subject to the object, so as to show that the art actually created by the artist is not something just later hung on the wall with a frame, but artistic activities that artists engage in when they create.^[3] Kosuth used the essential attribute of words, that is, the most basic language form of human communication, to present as an intuitive concept on the one hand, on the other hand, to attempt to break away from the halo of the protagonist imposed on artists by the commodity society, that is, “de sanctification”. Kosuth’s aesthetic thought of “linguistics”, which took philosophical rational orientation as the basis of artistic creation, was once highly praised and favored by the expressionists of conceptualism.

4. Art and Conceptualization --- the Paradox of “Success” under Conceptualism

4.1 Entropy of Society, Manifestation of Art and Politics

Entropy, explained by the second law of thermodynamics, is that in an isolated system with no energy exchange with the outside world, the increasing matter is called “entropy”. Compared to the present conceptual art, it is embodied in the cultural phenomenon of social generalization. Hegel once described art as a form that is sublated by culture, which is obviously a bit extreme. However, it is not difficult to see that in the process of historical development, art and philosophy have always

been regarded as a pair of basic cultural contradictions, which determine the overall trend of the culture of the times.

If the cultural theme of the past era is “philosophy and religion”, then the cultural theme of the current era can be said to have been switched to “art and politics”, and the phenomenon of times generalization is particularly obvious.

The first is pan media. As one of the four laws of media precisely expressed by McLuhan in his book *Understanding Media*, the meaning of pan media is very clear. Nowadays, the definition of media is highlighted as “all media of interpersonal interaction”. Since the second half of the 20th century, art has become more and more popular, universal and daily by means of image media and modeling methods, and the separation between art and life has disappeared. Therefore, the cultural trend of “pan aestheticization” is irresistible.

The second is pan politicization. With the increasing level of technology, political education through various electronic products has become a popular trend. National politics is the need of the development of the times.

Similarly, art is the enlightenment of conceptual art, and conceptual art has entered the trend of generalization. The elite art has entered into the public, and the mass art has a great potential to be popular. Art is no longer stubbornly based on the great direction of grand narrative, on the contrary, it takes mass culture as a cultural resource to seek inspiration. Art no longer breaks with tradition, and even learns humility and tolerance, does not refuse, exclude and rebel, but integrate with the public, make peace with the tradition, and seek a breakthrough in the tradition. Art has become mean, complex and diverse, and globalization has emerged, so the diversified value demands of its own cultural identity have become more and more important.

4.2 Time Gap between Culture and Market

Contemporary art is the product of the operation of commercial system. Take Zhang Xiaogang as an example.

Zhang Xiaogang is one of the earliest Chinese contemporary artists known overseas. When talking about Zhang Xiaogang’s art, everyone only admires his artistic achievements ten years ago. “Buyers won’t buy what I have now, just my past paintings.”^[4] For Zhang Xiaogang, the value of individual existence has been cruelly dispelled. In other words, if Zhang Xiaogang chooses to meet the needs of the capital market, he will have no choice but to recreate the past glory.

From Zhang Xiaogang’s personal point of view, the time gap between culture and market seems to be widening. People all think the only value of art is the market and the investment of capital. The society has become impetuous and unfamiliar. At Sotheby’s auction in New York in 2006, *Blood: Comrade 120* was sold at a high price, and the first record of million-yuan contemporary Chinese art was born. From this moment on, the definition of “success” was completely linked to capital. China’s market is full of arguments, and everything seems to be quantifiable. Some even reluctantly confessed to their friends, “I can resist the suppression of ideology, but I can’t resist the temptation of money.”

5. Conclusion

Only success can get rid of the law of the mean.

So, what is the definition of “success”? Nowadays, the style of social exaggeration prevails. Everyone only competes to sell talent and ability, and willingly becomes a vassal of capital. There seems to be only one reasonable explanation for success. Even Zhang Xiaogang, who was favored by the capital, could not help but mourn. “Since such success, the truly learned people have left me.” Human gradually lose vigor in learning. I am not here to lament the established reality of the past, but to express my feelings. How to reduce the gap between culture and capital market is rooted in the alienation of cognition. How to postpone the process of cognitive alienation and even change the world is an urgent problem to be solved. However, the loss and defects of a nation’s own cultural system will inevitably lead to the alienation and even reshaping of personal values, world

outlook and ideological outlook. Chinese conceptual art has its own aesthetic judgment and cultural self-discipline. Artists are based on their own context system. Only by reconstructing and reviving the local cultural system can they be regarded as the right way for the rise of Chinese conceptual art and a good medicine for cognitive alienation^[5-6].

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